

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT A 00776 042133Z
ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4227

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 0776

EO 11652 GDS

TAGS: SHUM, SOPN, HA

SUBJECT: TEMPORARY ARREST OF REPORTER AND INTERROGATION OF PUBLISHER

1. DIEUDONNE FARDIN, EDITOR OF OUTSPOKEN INTELLECTUAL WEEKLY LE PETIT SAMEDI SOIR (PSS), WAS DETAINED AND TAKEN TO THE CASERNES DESSALINES FOR FOUR HOURS OF INTERROGATION ON OR ABOUT FEBRUARY 28, ACCORDING TO A RELIABLE SOURCE. THIS INCIDENT FOLLOWED DISTRIBUTION THE PREVIOUS WEEKEND OF THE FEBRUARY 26-MARCH 3 EDITION OF PSS IN WHICH FARDIN VOCIFEROUSLY PROTESTED THE FEBRUARY 10 DETENTION AND INTERROGATION OF PSS AND RADIO METROPOLE REPORTER JULES NICOLAS.

2. ACCORDING TO PSS, AT 4:30 THAT AFTERNOON NICOLAS WAS OBSERVING THE "ANIMATED" SALE OF EMERGENCY SACKS OF RICE "UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A MINISTRY OF COMMERCE INSPECTOR." THE ARTICLE CLAIMED THAT THE INSPECTOR DEMANDED TO KNOW WHAT NICOLAS WAS DOING THERE, AND WHEN HE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS A PSS REPORTER, PROCEEDED TO ORDER HIS ARREST AND THE CONFISCATION OF HIS WALLET, I.D., TAPE RECORDER AND OTHER PERSONAL PROPERTY. ONLY AFTER A THREE-HOUR WAIT, HE WAS INTERROGATED AND FINALLY RELEASED AT 10:30 P.M. EXPLAINING THAT PSS IS PREPARING A REPORT ON THE RICE SHORTAGE, FARDIN THEN WROTE THAT THE ARREST OF HIS REPORTER WAS IN TOTAL DISREGARD OF THE HAITIAN CONSTITUTION AND ASKED FOR WHOM THE INSPECTOR WORKED.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 PORT A 00776 042133Z

HE SAID THE WEEKLY WAS UNABLE TO FIND ANYONE WHO COULD IDENTIFY THIS "ANONYMOUS" OFFICIAL.

3. THE REST OF THE LENGTHY ARTICLE WAS DEVOTED TO A DEFENSE OF THE RIGHT OF JOURNALISTIC INQUIRY, AND CONCLUDED: "LIBERTY IS FRAGILE. ITS PROTECTION SHOULD BE A DAILY CONCERN. TO SACRIFICE IT, EVEN FOR ONE PASSING TIME, IS TO BETRAY IT, ABOVE

ALL IN A COUNTRY AS OURS WHICH HAS A LONG TRADITION OF ANARCHY.
THERE WAS A TIME WHEN IN PORT AU PRINCE NEIGHBORHOOD PRISONS
ABOUNDED. THE COURTS DIDN'T OPERATE. ARRESTS WERE ARBITRARY,
TRIALS WERE RENDERED SPECTACLES BY CITIZENS WITHOUT TITLES OR
QUALIFICATIONS. THAT WAS THE PERIOD WHEN TI BOBO SPREAD
TERROR IN 'BOTH ENTRANCES TO THE CAPITAL' (TI BOBO WAS A TONTON
MACOUTE WHO IS SAID TO HAVE CONTROLLED ACCESS TO THE CAPITAL
FROM THE WEST AND TO THE NORTH)."

4. COMMENT: THIS ARBITRARY ARREST OF A REPORTER AND THE
SUBSEQUENT INTERROGATION OF HIS PUBLISHER ARE THE FIRST SUCH
INCIDENTS INVOLVING THE PRESS SINCE JEUNE PRESSE CO-EDITORS
LUC AND BOB NEREÉ WERE CALLED IN, QUESTIONED AND RELEASED
AT CASERNES DESALINES IN LATE JANUARY (PORT AU PRINCE 0429;
PAO MEMCON FEBRUARY 2, 1977). RICE DISTRIBUTION IS SENSITIVE
ISSUE INVOLVING CHARGES OF HOARDING AND PROFITEERING BY THE
POLITICALLY POWERFUL. IF FARDIN AND LIKE-MINDED PROGRESSIVE
JOURNALISTS PERSIST IN THEIR INVESTIGATIONS AND DENUNCIATIONS,
GOVERNMENT MAY TAKE STRONGER PUNITIVE MEASURES WHICH IN
TURN COULD NOT FAIL TO OFFSET GENERALLY FAVORABLE IMPACT OF
RECENT PRISONER RELEASES. WE WILL MAKE THIS POINT IN
APPROPRIATE QUARTERS.

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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